

PART XIII: 1899-1914

The city proudly dedicated its first library building on February 28, 1899. Edward Carrington Thayer, the donor, having died the previous July, the details of fitting the West Street mansion (formerly the home of Henry Colony) for public use as a library were directed by his widow and his niece. Control of the library was placed in the hands of 12 trustees, 6 of whom were a self-perpetuating body appointed by Thayer; the remaining trustees were elected by the City Councils. Miss Myra Southworth was appointed librarian, and the collection of 11,000 volumes was moved into the building from the former library rooms in City Hall. A new book stack, added in 1912, was the gift from a fund left by Mr. and Mrs. John Symonds. Miss Mary Lucina Saxton, who became librarian in 1911, devoted the following 36 years to developing library service throughout the city, and Miss Kate L. Tilden, one of the original trustees appointed by Edward Thayer in 1898, set a record by serving as a trustee for over 50 years.

The city entered into a contract with the Keene Gas Light Co. in July 1899 for 52 arc and 100 incandescent electric street lights. Expanded programs of public improvement also included the appointment of the first plumbing inspector and highway commissioners, the clearing of Beaver Brook, extension of the sewer system to West Keene in 1906, and improvements to the Beech Hill Park lands in 1908. The population of Keene in 1900 was 9,165, and in 1910 was 10,065. In 1906 the city's center of population was located at the corner of Washington and Spring Streets, just north of Central Square.

Underground telephone conduits at this time began to clear the business district of the maze of poles and wires which had so quickly sprung up to challenge the shade trees for space and attention. By 1900 electric power was being provided on a 24-hour basis, with new equipment being added at the Swanzey Factory generating station as demands for electricity increased. A second power company, the Citizen's Electric Light Co., was organized in 1905 with a Ralston Street plant. The competitor was purchased by the Keene Gas Light Co. in 1908, becoming the Keene Gas and Electric Co. This firm supplied power to the street railway enterprise after 1909, when the trolley company gave up its own generating activities.

A water shortage was experienced early in 1900, and a steam

fire engine was employed to pump Ashuelot River water into part of the city system. However, near flood conditions followed a short time later and produced some of the most serious high-water problems for the low areas in many years.

The Keene Electric Railway opened for regular service in September 1900. The first day was a free-fare holiday on which the public took full advantage of the opportunity to test the new trolley system. Passengers packed the cars, standing three-deep inside, while those who were unable to crowd into the vehicles watched from the sidewalks. Dirt and gravel from the recent construction lay deep upon the new rails and, as the wheels ground the stones, sparks flew in all directions.

Open trolley cars during the warm weather and enclosed ones in the winter became brief fixtures in Keene. Band concerts held in Marlborough were a means of attracting business to the railway, and special excursions on the line delighted all ages. Youngsters of the summer park programs had an outing each season at the Wilson Pond recreation area (called the "Rec"), climaxed by a ride on the electric cars back through the Square to Wheelock Park, to Marlborough, and return. A motorman of one of the first electric railway cars, Clarence L. Wyman, became general superintendent of the road in 1909. In 1926 the road petitioned to substitute buses for the trolleys. This petition was granted and the first of the motor buses ran on June 29 of that year. The last trolley operated over the July 4th holiday; the next morning the buses took over full operation. In 1929 the Keene Electric Railway was succeeded by the Cheshire Transportation Co., organized by Clarence L. Wyman and Louis N. Harper.

Two heavy naval cannon, gift of the government to the John Sedgwick Post No. 4, Grand Army of the Republic, arrived in Keene in April 1899, and were placed on either side of the Soldiers' Monument in Central Square. The "Walker" or "auction elm" at the head of Main Street, site of Keene's traditional Saturday public auction sales, was removed on October 19, 1900. Ornamental electric lights were installed on the Common in 1912. The first "Clean-Up Week" campaign was conducted in May 1914, sponsored by a citizens' committee.

The old bandstand at the head of Main Street had become somewhat dilapidated, partly as the result of repeated efforts over the years to burn it as one way of celebrating the Fourth of July Eve, and it was sold for one cent in 1900. Band concerts were given from a temporary bandstand erected on the site in 1902, and some were



Central Square winter scene showing the Ingersoll Fountain under protective covering

given from the balcony of the Cheshire House. A covered bandstand was built on the location of the old one in 1904, but was removed in 1913, the same year that the Ingersoll Fountain was taken down from Central Square Common. The last bandstand in the Square was located for a number of years in the Common, until traffic made concerts in the Square unfeasible, and the bandstand was moved to Fuller Park, where Tuesday evening concerts during the summer months attracted an audience that was able to enjoy the music from the comfort of their cars. At the end of each piece applause came from the sound of automobile horns. In 1966 the Fuller Park bandstand was taken down, and a new music shell was opened at Robin Hood Park.

Improvement of Keene streets was not without incident. In 1901 the "Cooke Elm" on West Street, one of the largest trees in the city and long considered a landmark, was ordered cut down in order to widen the street, and although reprieved for a time, it could not be saved despite efforts of the Rural Improvement Society. It was finally cut down in May 1914 and the trunk was found to measure from five-and-a-half to seven feet in diameter; it required the combined efforts of the steam roller and electric railway cars to haul away the tree's bulk. On West Street the bridge erected in 1837 was replaced by an iron one in 1900; the Spring Street and Water Street bridges over Beaver Brook were rebuilt in 1906; the Winchester Street covered bridge, built in 1851, gave way to a metal span in 1910. It was noted that the city had well-nigh to 100 bridges in 1905, all of

them slated to be replaced by iron structures when worn out.

A stone drinking fountain on Court Street was accepted by the city in May 1901, the gift of Mrs. Edward C. Thayer. A steel bridge connecting Greenlawn and Woodland Cemeteries was installed that same year. The municipal water system was extended, with improvements added as needs increased; the meter payment system was adopted in 1914. A new water main from Echo Lake by way of South Keene was opened in 1902, and a new Woodward Pond dam was constructed in 1910. The first garbage collection program was inaugurated in 1905 under city auspices.

The fire alarm box system and the new Beaver Mills whistle, installed in 1912, were improved and alarm equipment was expanded in 1911. Facilities for the Highway and Water Departments were erected in the rear of City Hall in 1913. Rural free mail delivery, as well as house numbering, was extended to South Keene and Swanzey Factory in 1902 and 1904.

Additional land was added to Ladies' Wildwood Park in 1909, the gift of Mrs. Sarah Haile Dort, and attention was given to the proper care and future protection of shade trees through projects of trimming in 1913. The brown-tail and gypsy moth were first noted in the city in 1910, supposedly brought by trains. Infected trees were cut and burned in 1913. The Yale Forest tract in Keene and Swanzey was established the same year, as an experimental and scientific preserve, the gift of George H. Myers and others to that Connecticut university.

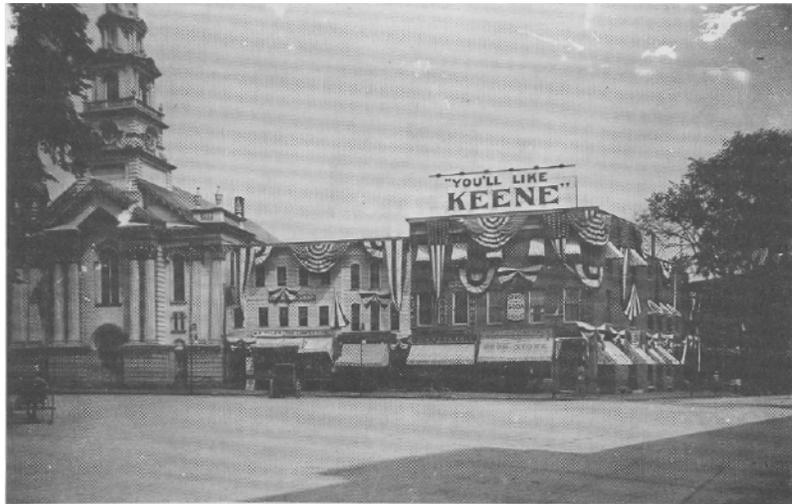


Paving Central Square

During hot weather Central Square was sprinkled on Sunday mornings before church services, and frequently during the week, but interest in paving the area grew and this was finally accomplished in 1910. The project caused considerable controversy, and opponents dubbed it "Benton's brickyard," after the mayor who led in the enterprise. Laying of vitrified brick was commenced on June 24 and was completed late the next month, despite labor troubles and public criticism. About 6,700 yards of brick were laid on a five-inch concrete cement foundation.

The *New Hampshire Sentinel* observed its centennial on March 22, 1899, with a special issue and reproduction of its first issue dated March 23, 1799. The New Hampshire Art Press was established in the city in 1904. The *Keene Daily News* was a short-lived publication of this period, issued in 1905, while the *Keene Free Press* published for a few months in 1910. This last newspaper joined with the *Cheshire Republican*, but in 1914 this too was suspended after 121 years of publication (sometimes under other names), first in Walpole and then in Keene, the major Democratic party voice in Cheshire County.

Some citizens, unsure whether the 20th century began in 1900 or 1901, took advantage of the opportunity to celebrate twice; actually the new century arrived on January 1, 1901, and was greeted with appropriate celebrations. At midnight a national salute was fired and special services were held in the churches and at the Masonic



Early 20th century Keene and a slogan that is still pertinent

Hall. Businessmen who met at the Cheshire House in November 1902 to honor the completion of John P. Rust's pail factory took steps to reestablish the local Board of Trade. The Commercial Club was formed in February 1903 to foster community interests. One of its projects was the erection of a large billboard at the railroad station with information about Keene, "a thriving community" in the "heart of New England." Another large sign was erected atop Clarke's Block on the corner of Washington Street and Central Square which proclaimed "You'll Like Keene."

Pioneer Community Chest activity may be seen in the 1905 formation of the Keene Associated Charities. The Elisha Lane Exchange Block was erected in 1908, and the Nims Block on the corner of West and Federal Streets was built in 1911. An extension of the Cheshire County Court House on Winter Street was made during 1911

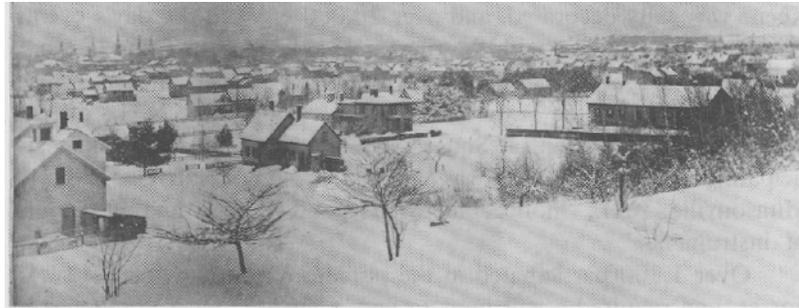
The city worked out special plans to celebrate the 4th of July 1903 as the 150 anniversary of the formation of a town government. Keene was gaily decorated, and over 20,000 enjoyed the day's events which began at sunrise with the ringing of bells and the firing of guns. The city band of Rutland, Vt., presented a concert at the Keene Driving Park, and the American Band of Claremont, N.H., offered another concert in Central Square. Among other musical units participating in the celebration was the L. J. Colony Chair Co. Band of Munsonville, N.H., "noticeable for its good playing and full quota of instruments."

Over 1,300 participated in the parade, which also included 245 horses, and required a half-hour to pass a given point. Ceremonies in Central Square featured music by school children and the Keene Chorus Club, and an oration by Rev. Josiah L. Seward. A platform had been erected at the north side of the park, and here a living flag (on a tier of seats 25 feet high and 72 feet long) was composed of boys dressed in blue, 45 of them holding white stars, and girls with red caps and white dresses. In all there were 350 children in the formation.

A baseball game between railroad shop teams of Keene and Mechanicville, N. Y., played in the afternoon, was won by the visitors 20-15. The high school team met the Marlborough town baseball team and lost by a score of 10-3. One game was held at the Keene Driving Park and the other on a field fitted up off Island Street. Horse trotting and other sports were also featured, as became the custom at the early observances of Labor Day in Keene.

The gigantic display of fireworks at the Driving Park in the evening was witnessed by 7,000 spectators. One of the best pyrotechnic displays ever seen in the city, it was opened by figures in fire, "1753 Keene 1903," and included hanging lights 100 feet long, pictures in colored fire, and comic features. The electric railway opened service to the area of the Driving Park on lower Main Street that same day and ran trains of four to seven cars to and from the Square, yet hundreds had to walk in order to witness the spectacular.

Development of the Keene Driving Park into a residential area was begun in 1913; the name Edgewood was suggested by Mrs. H. H. Pease of Marlborough in a contest sponsored by the Keene Park Corporation, managers of this pioneer Keene home development. One of the last uses to which the area was put before the housing development started was as an encampment for units of the National Guard in the summer maneuvers of 1911.



*Looking west from Wilber Street—old
Lincoln Street school on right*

School affairs in Keene saw the completion of a new Lincoln School building in 1901. The first public school kindergartens were established at the Tilden and Elliot Street Schools in 1903. Because of crowded conditions in the schools, rooms in the Warren Block had to be used for school purposes, but expansion became necessary and negotiations for the acquisition of the Coolidge lot north of City Hall as a site for a high school building were also begun in 1903. The Franklin School was built in 1907, and an enlarged Symonds School was finished that same year.

An appreciation of scientific progress was shown by a model of an electric railway system and lights powered by a dynamo and water

motor, which was constructed by Principal Robert Ray in August 1899. Greek and Latin remained fixed standards in the school program for college preparation. High school seniors began annual trips to Washington about 1904 and continued the tradition for many years.

A friendly suit was brought to court in 1904 to determine the city's title to the Washington Street property, gift of Henry O. Coolidge in 1890. On this site a new high school building was erected and opened for classes in the fall of 1912. The new building had separate doors for boys and girls on the north and south and was of fireproof construction throughout. There was a library room on the first floor opposite the main entrance, and in Principal William H. Watson's office a master clock controlled an automatic system of clocks and bells. On the basement floor a room was provided for display of the Keene Natural History Society's collection of mounted birds, shells, and minerals. Eight classrooms on the first floor seated 40 pupils each, and nine other classrooms were located on the second floor with the auditorium, where the entire school met daily for opening exercises and prayer. Laboratories and scientific equipment were arranged in special quarters on the second floor. The walls of the auditorium were decorated with bas relief representations of Music, Harmony, and patriotic subjects. The Dinsmoor property to the north of the new school was leased in 1915 by trustees of the Academy Fund to be used for domestic and mechanic arts courses.

In April 1902 the hospital trustees accepted a bequest from the heirs of Edward Joslin to erect a nurses' home, which was opened in September 1902 near the hospital. An alumnae association at the nurses' training school had been formed in 1901. Aid for the hospital was raised through a benefit performance of "The Old Homestead" by Denman Thompson on May 2, 1903, at the City Hall. The Hospital Aid Society benefited in a similar manner through a performance of the "Ladies' Minstrel Troop" in January 1904. Englewood Rest, a sanatorium, opened in West Keene in 1912; Whitebrook was another rest home in the same area.

A significant advance not only in local education but state higher education as well was made in 1909 with the establishment of Keene Normal School, incorporated April 9. A need for more professionally trained teachers in the state began moves to found institutions for the purpose of teacher education, and Keene was finally selected as one of the sites, aided by the city's gift of a valuable Main Street estate, the Governor Samuel W. Hale property on the corner of Winchester Street. With the assistance of the city, the new school also purchased

the Thayer estate, where Miss Catherine Fiske had once conducted her well-known young ladies' seminary. Jeremiah M. Rhodes of the Emporia (Kansas) State Normal School was selected as the first principal when the institution was opened on September 28, 1909. The original enrollment was 26; five young ladies, already experienced teachers, were permitted to graduate at the first commencement on June 28, 1910. The faculty numbered five, assisted by teachers of Keene schools. Double the initial enrollment was received the second year, and one faculty member was added. Wallace E. Mason succeeded Rhodes as principal in 1911, and expanded programs, lectures, and institutes were established. A need for dormitory and other facilities was met in 1913. Summer sessions were inaugurated in 1914. A one-year program of studies was replaced by two and three-year programs after 1916, when new courses in home economics, commercial studies, mechanical arts, music, and art were added.

Private education in the city continued to be offered by the Misses Laura B. and Kate L. Tilden, Ellen Perry, and a kindergarten at St. James Parish Hall, as well as by the parochial school, and at Tiffin's Business Institute.

Harvard alumni organized in Keene during 1902 and the men of Dartmouth in 1911.

A serious fire in March 1899 and another in July 1900 destroyed a storehouse of the Cheshire Chair Co., and farm buildings of Colonel Henry E. Clark burned in September of that year. Beaver Mills suffered a serious fire later in September, and the Holbrook Grocery Co. warehouse was damaged in July 1901. A fire at Giffin's Mills in 1902 was the work of an incendiary who was soon apprehended; another firebug was sought by authorities in early 1903. Clarke's Block at the head of the Square suffered two fires during July 1903, and a South Keene brick mill was destroyed by flames in 1908. Unusually dry weather in 1911 was responsible for several serious brush and forest fires in the Keene area. The fire station was damaged by fire in May 1914.

There was some anxiety in Keene for the safety of Rev. and Mrs. Frank M. Chapin, for 20 years missionaries in China, and not heard from during the June 1900 Boxer uprising. The First Church sponsored a missionary into the troubled area beginning in 1904. Aid from the city was sent to sufferers in the Galveston, Tex., hurricane and flooding of 1900, also to Indians. Flood victims in the West were aided in 1912.

The shooting of President William McKinley at Buffalo, N. Y.,

on September 6, 1901, and his death on September 14 were deeply felt in Keene. The *Keene Evening Sentinel* published an extra, flags were flown at half-staff, the city's bells were tolled, and even the waitresses at the Cheshire House donned mourning. Black and white rosettes appeared on the Keene Electric Railway trolley cars, and a number of buildings were draped in black. All churches held memorial services; symbols of mourning, portraits of the assassinated President, and evidences of public grief were everywhere to be seen. Business was suspended on September 19, the afternoon of the President's funeral in Washington, and special services were held at the same time in several Keene churches.

Need for expanded post office facilities prompted the government in 1907 to purchase the General Griffin property on West Street for a new federal building, which was erected in 1911. The old William Lamson house, built in 1804, was razed for the project, which required extensive driving of piles to establish a firm foundation. Lamson Street and part of Federal Street were laid out at this time. The Citizens National Bank soon occupied the former post office on the corner of West Street and Central Square.

Keene's first murder in over 20 years was that of Mrs. Louis Castor on May 31, 1899, for which her husband was arrested. The 1904 trial and life sentence of Malachi Barnes for a Sullivan, N.H., murder were also of local interest. A serious outbreak of scarlet fever early in 1901 saw 181 cases reported during its three-months' duration and 22 deaths from the disease. Schools were closed and church services and public meetings were canceled during the epidemic. Smallpox appeared in February 1901, measles in 1906, and scarlet fever again closed schools for a short time in 1913.

William S. Briggs died in Montpelier, Vt., in 1901, and was brought to Keene for burial. His newspaper writings on early Keene are of great value to local historical researchers. General Simon Goodell Griffin died in 1902, and the city voted to publish his *History of the Town of Keene*, which had been authorized in 1895. This work, issued in 1904, was the most complete Keene history up to that time and included a compilation of events from 1874 to 1904 by Frank H. Whitcomb, city clerk. In 1905 Whitcomb compiled Keene's vital statistics in book form. The city report of 1907 contained a historical sketch of the business district written by Samuel Wadsworth, city engineer and historian, who also prepared maps of the area as it appeared at different periods. The earliest proprietors' and town record books were rebound and preserved for the city in 1910.

Seventh Day Adventists formed a church (in August 1901) composed of a small group. Public Christian Science services in Keene had their beginning in the summer of 1908; private services had been held in the city as early as 1898. The Full Gospel Mission was organized in 1907 under the leadership of Oscar H. Thayer.

The Keene Development Co., formed in 1912 to promote Keene as an industrial site, was able to attract a number of firms to the community, and helped establish a diversified business atmosphere in Keene.

The Ashuelot Gas & Electric Co. was formed in 1911, and had electric generating facilities outside Keene, leasing its properties to the local firm for operation. The Keene-Vernon 66,000-volt transmission line was constructed in 1911 enabling the firm to discontinue local steam and water-powered generating activity. Soon electricity was extended to neighboring towns and the Cheshire County Farm by 1912.

A twin-state lodge and Knights Templar convention was held in Keene in 1901, and Asteria Chapter of Eastern Star was formed in January 1905. The Keene Lodge of Perfection and Keene Council Princes of Jerusalem were chartered in March 1906. A local lodge of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks was founded in July 1904, with its original meeting place in the Chamberlain Block. In July 1915 the organization purchased a Roxbury Street house, formerly the residence of Rev. Edward A. Renouf, and in 1919 bought a camp on the East Surry Road. Spanish-American War veterans established the Darwin M. Aldrich Chapter of their national association soon after the turn of the century. It was named in honor of a Keene soldier who had died in military service.

The Cheshire County Humane Society was founded in 1875 and was incorporated under this name in 1914. Mrs. Jennie B. Powers, who was named agent of the organization in 1903, devoted 30 years to a one-woman crusade against cruelty to children and animals. Mrs. Powers was as adept at rescuing kittens from trees as she was at dispatching aged or wounded animals, and she cut a familiar figure in her blue uniform, probably the only lady in town to "pack" a revolver. She was relentless against the mistreatment of young children; few dared disregard her warnings, and her ceaseless activity made the Cheshire County Humane Society respected by all.

The Keene Council of the Knights of Columbus was organized among Catholic men in May 1904, with 43 charter members. The Fraternal Order of Eagles in Keene was instituted in March 1906 with 71 charter members. Career women founded the Business and

Professional Women's Club in 1912 (some employers suspected this was an effort on the part of all working women to get Saturday afternoons off). The initial idea of the Keene Woman's Club began in the city on April 16, 1910, when representatives of the Fortnightly, Colonial, Tourist, Current Events, Froebel, and Granite Clubs met to discuss the formation of a City Federation of Women's Clubs. An organization by that name began on October 4, 1910, with Miss Laura Tilden as its first president, and this association initiated measures of public improvement, including the establishment of the public rest rooms opened in the Chamberlain Block in 1912, the systematic collection of garbage in 1913, matters of juvenile crime prevention, and other progressive programs in cooperation with municipal authorities. The Ladies' Charitable Society celebrated its centennial in November 1915, still actively giving aid to the Bureau of Public Service and various benevolent causes.

Women enjoyed few equal employment privileges with men at this time, although an increasing number were being employed in office and clerical positions. Working hours for women usually ran from 8 A.M. to 5:30 or 6 P.M. six days a week. The organization of working women in Keene was led by Mrs. Grace Tiffin, wife of the owner of Tiffin's Business Institute. Lectures and some educational programs were held and an annual dance was sponsored on St. Valentine's Day.

The Daughters of the American Revolution rededicated the old West Keene Cemetery in 1900 and the former Boston Road (Baker Street), the route taken by Keene soldiers when they marched to Concord in 1775, in 1902. A tablet bearing the names of Keene soldiers in the Revolution was unveiled at the Keene Public Library in 1902, and in 1904 the DAR was responsible for moving 10 gravestones from the ancient Main Street Cemetery to the Washington Street Cemetery, where they were marked. Decorative gates were also installed at the Washington Street Cemetery.

The Heaton House, the oldest in the city (No. 500 Marlboro Street) was marked in 1906, and the site of the Upper Ashuelot fort on Main Street was noted by a boulder and tablet in 1909. Keene's first meetinghouse site was commemorated in 1913. A chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution was organized in February 1903.

The city participated in the erection of markers in August 1907 at the junction of Keene and Sullivan on the original line of the townships, and at the 1733 "Statia" survey location off Silent Way in 1902.



*Baker Street with marker showing route taken by
Keene volunteers in 1775*

A local organization which won a high place in musical circles was the Keene Chorus Club, begun in 1902. Conductor Nelson P. Coffin set a high standard of achievement and for a number of years the organization was recognized as one of the finest in the country. The club's first public concert was given on February 20, 1902. Visiting artists who performed with the local chorus included some of the nation's outstanding musicians, and the club's annual festival became an outstanding musical event. Coffin led in the performance of programs representing classic and modern works of the first order.

The Boston & Maine Railroad assumed management of the Fitchburg Railroad and its Cheshire Division on July 1, 1900. The numbering of locomotives belonging to the Fitchburg Railroad was again changed by the Boston & Maine. The old covered railroad depot on Main Street was replaced in 1910 by a smaller building, and the old station was eulogized by H. Adelaide Woods, a local poet, in "Good-Bye, Old Depot." William C. Hall, ticket agent and local travel representative who worked under all three Keene railroad managements, was honored for 50 years of service in November 1920. His daughter, Florence Hall, in 1901 became one of the first women employed by any New England railroad ticket office. She sold the last ticket from the old covered station and the first from the new one. Mortimer "Morty" Riordon, who retired from railroad service in 1900, had spent 37 years of his life in the baggage room, where he had worked from early morning until 10 P.M. daily, without a vacation or a day out for sickness. He also attended to the 10 station stoves and esti-

mated that he had, over the years, wheeled some 22,000 cords of wood to keep them supplied with fuel.

The Trinity Cycle Co. on Church Street commenced the manufacture of automobiles at the turn of the century. The firm had been experimenting with machines under its manager, Reynold Janney. His pioneer product used kerosene as fuel and managed a top speed of eight miles an hour. An engine constructed along different lines from any then in use was devised for the automobile made in the Keene factory. The firm was purchased by a Delaware corporation in 1901, but that soon ran into financial difficulties.

Janney's son, Russell Janney, in later years was a press agent, theatrical manager, and author of the best-selling novel *The Miracle of the Bells*. As a boy, young Janney had his introduction to the theater delivering handbills for shows in Keene's City Hall auditorium.

The Trinity automobile was not the first locally-owned horseless carriage. Several pioneer inventor-mechanics constructed automobiles, including Leonard A. Wellington, who appeared on the streets in a small motor wagon in October 1899. It weighed only 150 pounds, and the frame was of light metal and tubing equipped with bicycle wheels and a small gasoline engine of about three-quarters of a horsepower. The car was built by Wellington while he was employed in Winchendon, Mass. It attracted considerable attention as the first automobile owned by a Keene resident. Harry T. Kingsbury of the Wilkins Toy Co. also made an automobile at his shop late in 1900. The motor of this machine was mounted on the front axle itself and had two cylinders and three speeds.

The newspaper of July 25, 1900, noted two automobiles in the Square during the noon hour; "Keene is getting to be quite up-to-date." Frank Thompson of West Swanzey had driven an automobile all the way from Tarrytown, N. Y., earlier in June, a considerable feat. William Hall of Bellows Falls drove one of the two cars noted by the local paper, and had made the journey to Keene in 1 hour and 15 minutes. Reynold Janney brought a machine to Keene from Tarrytown, N. Y., in August 1900, probably the first "boughten" car owned in Keene.

The first automobile garages and dealers were listed under the directory heading of bicycle repairers and suppliers in 1905, and included the Keene Auto-Cycle Co., the Maxwell dealership, and Robertson & Bennett, who offered the first rent-a-car agency in town. This pioneer service center also offered the Stoddard-Dayton machine, Stanley Steamers, the Jackson, and the first Ford cars in the

city. A separate directory listing for automotive service did not appear until 1913. Among the many early motor names with Keene dealerships were Overland cars and trucks, Chalmers, Reo, Hupmobile, Metz, Saxon, Oakland, Franklin, Hudson, and Grant. Others included familiar names still associated with the industry.



The Common, early 20th century, showing the latest in automotive design

The Robertson Motor Co. began in April 1904, when George B. Robertson drove a Stanley Steamer from Boston to Keene and opened a dealership with Frank J. Bennett. The firm offered the first dump trucks in the state. Keene's first automobile show, the first such exhibition in the state, was staged in 1907. Despite fears for the safety of the floor, the machines were displayed in the auditorium of City Hall without incident, while an airplane hung from the ceiling.

A bystander on a Sunday morning in 1911 counted 208 teams, 188 bicycles, 88 automobiles, and 9 motorcycles in the Square. In 1914 the *Keene Evening Sentinel* commented on enforcement of traffic regulations in the Square, and while willing to admit their necessity as a means of protection on the open road where automobiles were run at "considerable speed," could see little need for strict regulations in the Square itself, "where there is lots of room and which is a stopping place for a large proportion of the vehicles." However, traffic regulations were adopted by the City Councils in June 1914.

Motion picture entertainment became established in Keene with

the opening of the Majestic Theater on Church Street on January 9, 1905, as the "Nickel Theater." Keene's second movie house was the Star Theater, located in a vacant store at the head of the Square. It opened in April 1908 and became the Bijou shortly afterwards, though it did not last long. The Dreamland Theater, opened in 1909, was located on Roxbury Street. Vaudeville bills, as well as silent pictures, were featured, the Dreamland advertising an entire change of program daily with admission at five cents. The Majestic proudly announced that almost two miles of film were shown at each performance and suggested that Keene citizens "get the habit," which they did.

After the Dreamland closed it was followed by another motion picture house which became an established local institution for over 50 years. The Scenic Theater at No. 106 Main Street opened on March 2, 1914. It boasted 550 seats downstairs and 250 in the balcony. The fireproof curtain of asbestos was decorated by a Boston artist, and a pianist and drummer established a musical background for the silent "flickers." Films changed daily, the vaudeville acts varied twice a week, and admission was now 10 cents.

The first exhibition of talking pictures was held at City Hall on September 10, 1913. The invention was that of Thomas A. Edison, a system linking the phonograph with the motion picture projector by means of black thread running to the screen, called the kinetophone. The Dreamland showed these pioneer "talkies" in October.



Dreamland Theatre

A number of traveling shows played Keene during these years. An annual dramatic production by the Keene Light Guard, assisted by the ladies of the city, was a Memorial Day tradition, and the People's Institute lectures and cultural programs, organized in 1914, brought a measure of educated entertainment, as did the famed Chautauqua programs inaugurated in Keene on July 21-27, 1914. Organized under the direction of the Chautauqua Association of Pennsylvania in cooperation with more than 200 cities and towns, Chautauqua brought some 30 events to the city each year, held in a tent at the rear of the Washington Street high school building. John Philip Sousa's Band appeared at City Hall in May 1906 on one of its tours of the United States.

The circus was a spectacular welcomed each summer. The Elks carnival on the Island Street grounds in July 1912 was one of the largest such shows in the city. Playing in more than 30 tents, the freaks, performing animals, and flea circus captivated every viewer, while a huge carousel, Ferris wheel, balloon ascension, and parachute jump made a lasting impression and brought its share of adventure, color, and suspense.

A baseball field was laid out off Island Street at this time, where some carnivals and sports events were also held. The names of the streets, which were located near the site of the former baseball field (Hooper, Cady, Cobb, Speaker, and Wood), honor baseball greats, some of whom played exhibition games in Keene.

Radio was a form of home entertainment introduced to Keene in 1912. The first set was owned by Reginald F. Howe, who journeyed to the Charlestown Navy Yard to take examinations for a radio operator's license. News arrived in Keene by means of the wireless much faster than it had ever been received before, and *Sentinel* reporter Don J. Williams sat with Howe to take down the list of survivors of the *Titanic* disaster when that shocking news was flashed to the world. The latest news from Washington and the world was relayed to Keene by early radio operators who had constructed their own sets, and formed a Wireless Club of "ham" enthusiasts.

Soon after the advent of the "air age" Keene shared the growing interest in the novelty of flight. Harry B. Brown is given credit for having flown the first airplane over Keene in the fall of 1912. The first take-off of an airship from Keene occurred that same year. It had been shipped in parts by rail and assembled for a demonstration at the Keene Driving Park. Though the machine did take off, it landed in the top of a nearby tree soon afterward, convincing many that

there was nothing to this new craze. Rugged New Hampshire terrain was not the most inviting territory for the pioneers of flight, although Harry M. Atwood flew from Waltham, Mass., to Manchester, N.H., in 1912. Balloonists were common enough as attractions at fairs and carnivals, but more ambitious projects had to wait for the development the First World War provided.

Labor unions organized about 1905 with the formation of Local 132 United Garment Workers of America at the Brattleboro Overall Co. plant in Keene. The machinists had an earlier organization, and protective associations had been formed as beneficial societies around the turn of the century. Union organization of printer and pressmen crafts, the carpentry trade, and painters followed within 10 years. Labor relations were generally good, although strikes did take place, such as that in January 1903 at the C. B. Lancaster Shoe Factory, for which special police details were organized.

Keene as a city was by this time an industrial community, but it served a large rural area, and interest in agricultural affairs was important to the city's economy.

Keene's first municipal Christmas tree, a 50-foot spruce, was set up on the Common in 1913. It was surrounded by smaller illuminated trees, and the whole Square was decorated with lights and evergreens. Carol singing and distribution of gifts to needy children attracted a large crowd. The event was sponsored by the city, its churches, and various civic groups. George M. Rossman, who was largely responsible for this municipal program, coordinated most of the activities, including a chorus of 1,000 school children, band music, and the distribution of gifts in all parts of the city. "As a whole, Christmas Eve was more generally celebrated throughout the city than ever before," the *Keene Evening Sentinel* reported. There was caroling at the hospital, the Invalid's Home, and elsewhere, and decorations and Christmas lights were displayed on a scale never before known in Keene.

An event long remembered was the visit by President William Howard Taft on October 10, 1912. It was the first time the city had played host to a Chief Executive while in office. Motoring through Keene on his way to Dublin for a short vacation, the President, with Mrs. Taft and an official party, was expected to make a brief stop about 5 P.M. The party became victim to one of early touring's hazards, inadequate road marking, and became lost outside of Newport, N.H. After short stops in Marlow and Gilsum, the group arrived in Keene two hours behind schedule. Some 8,000-10,000 people were on hand in the Square to cheer the President and hear his short address

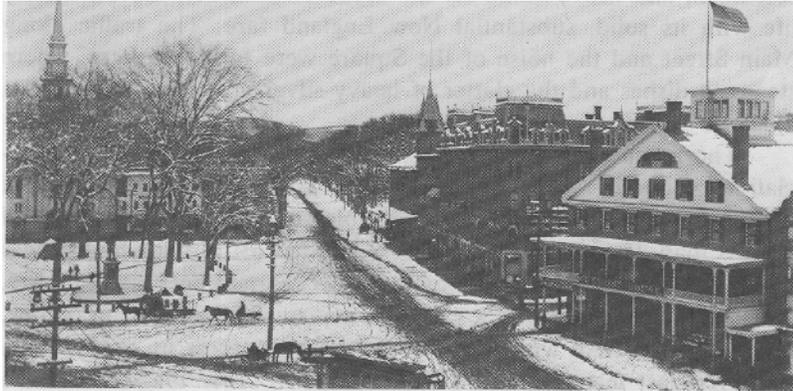
from the balcony of the Cheshire House. A testimony to Taft's speaking ability and vocal powers was the fact that his remarks on American prosperity and foreign trade and its effect on the national economy could be heard as far away as the railroad tracks. An official reception committee headed by Mayor Charles G. Shedd extended the hospitality of the city, and later sent to President Taft in Washington a leather-bound copy of the city's 1912 report containing an account of the visit.

Others of renown to visit Keene included Clarence S. Darrow, the noted defense lawyer, who spoke at City Hall in November 1910 in support of liquor license interests. Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn composer, lectured in the YMCA Bible series at the Court Street Congregational Church in October 1903, and Elbert Hubbard spoke on "Roycroft Ideals" and a new approach to craftsmanship in April 1902. Sam Walter Foss, the poet famous for his "The House by the Side of the Road," was a guest of the Current Events Club about 1910.

Hetty Green, "the richest woman in America," spent a few hours in the railroad station waiting room of the city in August 1905 and attracted the attention of the curious. Carrie Nation, the lady with the ax, whose famous war on saloons has become legendary, passed through Keene on September 12, 1902, on her way to Bellows Falls, Vt., for a lecture engagement. Upon the arrival of her train, someone who had recognized her stepped off the platform and directed the attention of bystanders to the window of the day coach where she was sitting. One young man, knowing that her hatred of tobacco was almost as great as her hatred for liquor, pulled a package of cigarettes from his pocket and handed them around to the group which had gathered. Soon all were puffing with exaggerated gusto, and the wag held up the package as if to offer the enraged lady a smoke. She tried without success to open the train window, but the cars pulled out, and her advice to Keene in its ways of sin is lost to history. As the train moved out of the station, the delighted group struck up the popular tune, "Good Morning, Carrie," sending the famed reformer off with what must have been a very dim view of Keene manners and morals.

By far the most unusual visitor to the public scene in this period was "Minnie," the elephant which formed a part of the traveling road show, "The Chimes of Normandy," given at City Hall on September 23, 1913. The troop numbered about 80, including musicians, and they gave a performance which was enjoyed by the largest audience

ever assembled in the city for such a production. The elephant, weighing some 6,000 pounds, played in one scene on the stage, and was taken into the hall by way of the main stairs. Between the acts "Minnie" was allowed to step down from the stage and walk about the aisles. She was so tall that her back scraped against the balcony, much to the delight of the audience.



*Central Square, showing the Cheshire House (1837-1934)
which was renowned for the plain art of good food*